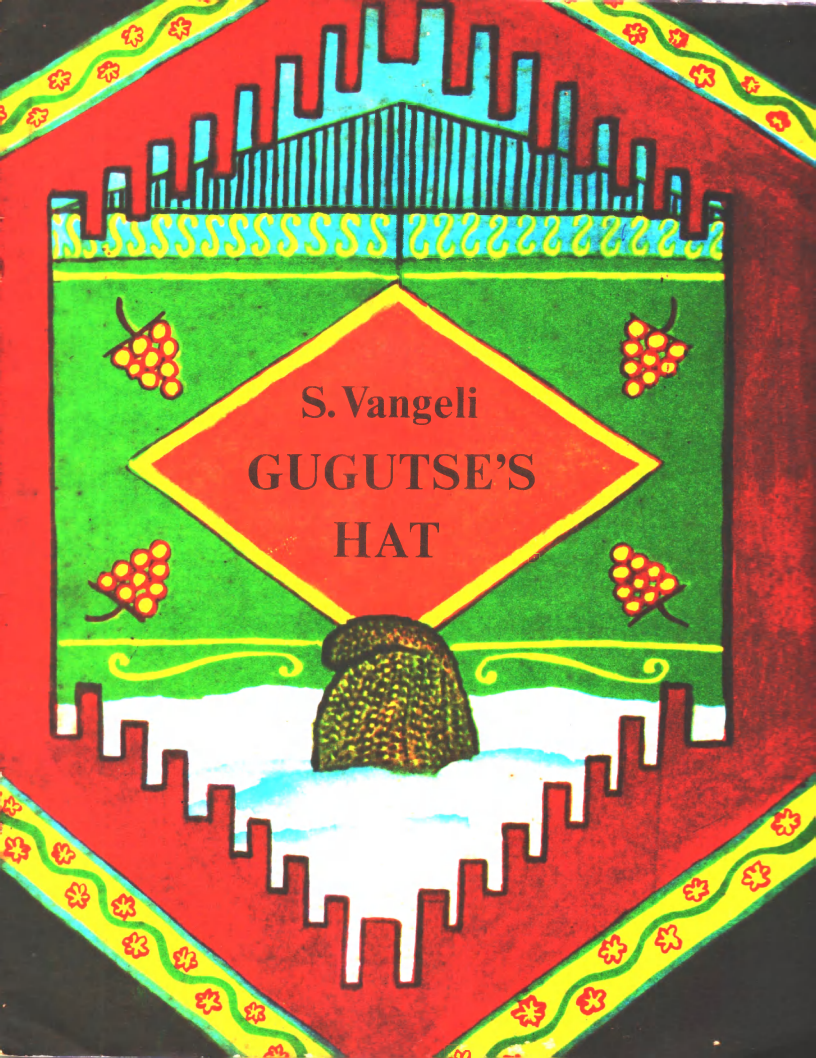

S. Vangeli
GUGUTSE'S
HAT





Spiridon Vangeli

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Drawings by Viktor Duvidov
Translated by James Riordan

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GUGUTSE'S HAT

Gugutse's father once made him a floppy hat.

"But, Papa," said Gugutse, "it falls over my eyes."

"Lift it up then," said his father. "That'll keep you busy all winter."

"So that's it," thought Gugutse. "He thinks I've nothing better to do. Well, I'll show him."

Gugutse was up first next morning, tiptoed into the yard and fed the sheep. When his father appeared, Gugutse was riding on the back of a ram.

"Good morning, Gugutse," he called.

"Hello, Papa," the little boy said, waving his hand (as if to say "you can take the feed back—I've fed the sheep already").

From then on, Gugutse began to look after the sheep himself.

The days grew colder. Each footstep in the snow creaked like treading on violin strings.



As Gugutse was walking along one day, he passed a girl, blue with cold. Taking her books so that she could put her hands into her sleeves, he tucked them under his arm. All of a sudden, a bright idea came to him: "Why not put them in my hat—there's plenty of room for the books and my head." He took off his hat, then looked at the girl.

"Are you cold?" he asked. "Truly?"

"A little," admitted the girl, her teeth chattering.

"Then take my hat."

"No, Gugutse, you will freeze," she replied. "Anyway, girls do not wear such hats."

"Never mind," said Gugutse. "It can stay behind."

So saying, he dropped his hat in the snow.

On went the pair, Gugutse in front, the girl following. A few steps farther on, they looked round—and there lay the hat on the ground, sad and forlorn, cast aside by its master.

Suddenly, the hat stood up; filling out as if taking a deep breath. It breathed in and out and began to grow.

Gugutse stared, turned back, picked up his hat and at once put it on the girl and himself. And off they went to school, the hat sheltering them from the frost.



From that day, Gugutse would be waiting with his hat as soon as the first class came through the school gates. He would take seven or eight girls home under his hat; even the schoolmistress once accompanied the children home from school under it. People stared and shrugged, exclaiming,

"What a hat! Like a haystack! Wonders will never cease!"

As soon as Gugutse had taken the children home, his hat would become small enough to hang up indoors.

One day, however, the hat tricked him. No matter what he did—promising his hat this and that, begging it, stroking it ... yet the hat would not grow.

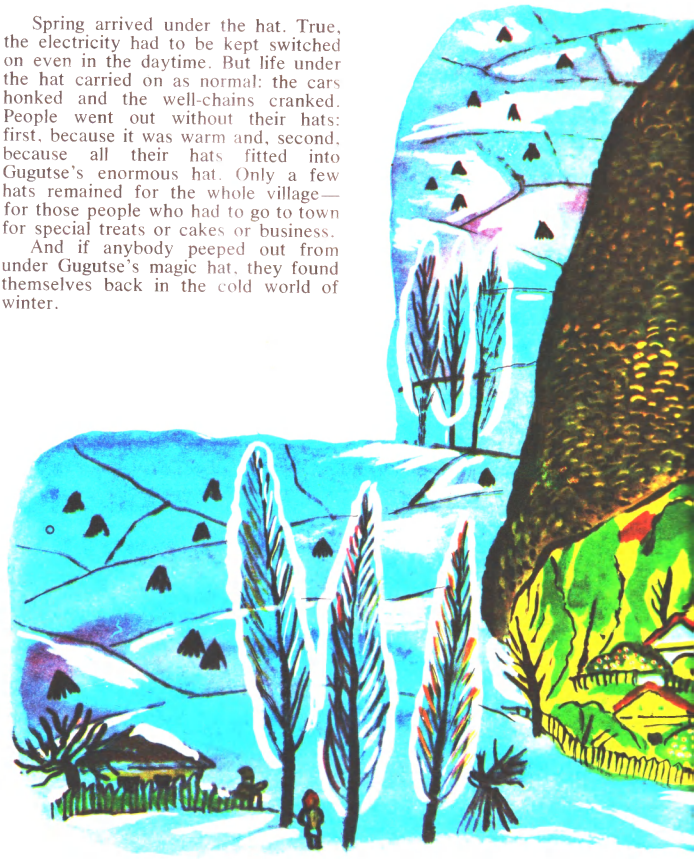
And it was so cold the school bell had lost its voice and not a single dog would bark throughout the village.

When Gugutse came home, he understood: he had not fed the sheep that morning. He tapped his head to remind himself not to forget in future; and his hat started to obey him again.

Presently, he had an idea. Wouldn't it be wonderful to cover the entire village and all the houses with his hat. So he began to feed the sheep of his neighbours as well. The hat grew and grew until it almost blotted out the sky.

Spring arrived under the hat. True, the electricity had to be kept switched on even in the daytime. But life under the hat carried on as normal: the cars honked and the well-chains cranked. People went out without their hats: first, because it was warm and, second, because all their hats fitted into Gugutse's enormous hat. Only a few hats remained for the whole village—for those people who had to go to town for special treats or cakes or business.

And if anybody peeped out from under Gugutse's magic hat, they found themselves back in the cold world of winter.







SNOWDROPS

One day Gugutse found seven coins. No more and no less (he could count to seven—even up to ten). He dropped the coins into his deepest pocket and left them untouched for three days—he thought, perhaps, more money would appear. But nothing else did find its way into his pocket, save a nail. His little sister said that money did not hop into her pocket either. As for Papa's pocket ... well, who can say: he was not at home.

The day that comes but once a year was fast approaching—that occasion when all the men give presents to all the ladies. Gugutse was the first of the men in his village to go to the shop. On the way, he planned to buy his mother a car. Of course, he, Gugutse, would drive her to the market in it.

Rubbing his hands, the boy entered the shop. But he did not find what he wanted; even Gugutse would not fit into the cars on sale, let alone Mama.

Instead, he bought a button. Now he had three pennies left. He would have to buy a dress to go with the button. Not any dress—a blue one. Sadly, there was no blue dress on display. Should he, then, take those high-heel shoes? Gugutse was about to ask the shopgirl for them when he remembered something: he did not know Mama's size.

Off home he went to wait for evening, when Mama would go to bed. And to send her to sleep all the sooner, he began to tell her a story about a princess. Mama fell asleep half-way through, leaving the other half of the story in Gugutse's head. Never mind, the princess would have to be saved from the dragon another day. Gugutse had other things to do.

He tiptoed out of the bedroom and soon returned holding a piece of string. As he was measuring Mama's foot with his string, her hand stirred. At once he took Mama's hand in his and softly sang it a lullaby:

So still the night in slumberland,
Go to sleep, my little hand.

And the hand soon went back to sleep, lulled by his song. Gugutse measured Mama's foot and lay down in bed, hiding the string under his pillow.

Next morning, he straight away ran to the shop. Trying his piece of string against all the shoes, he chose the best pair. Then ... alas! ... he noticed the price. He scratched his right ear, took out his three coins, counted and recounted them, scratched his left ear, put the shoes back on the counter and left the shop.

If you had been in those parts, you would have seen Gugutse leave the village and walk along the hill path; you would have seen his hat bobbing up and down in the distance before vanishing behind the ridge of the hill. And then you would have seen him coming down the hill carrying a bunch of snowdrops. His boots had grown lazy, getting in the way of his legs; his hat, too, was so tired it flopped down over his head. But Gugutse was plainly stronger than his unfortunate boots and hat. He carried the snowdrops straight to the shop. The largest posy he presented to the shopgirl, the remainder to all the customers.

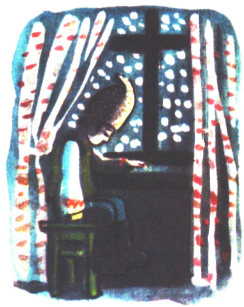
They were the very first snowdrops people had seen that year. Everyone was full of praise for Gugutse; the shopgirl even patted his hat (though, really, his hat had nothing to do with it). And then, in front of the girl, Gugutse took out his three coins, counted them three times, looked at the shoes and sighed. But she did not show she knew.



The sun was setting, white clouds were gathering, and Gugutse still had no present for Mama.

"Never mind," he consoled himself, "in the morning I'll be up as soon as it's light and I'll go to pick some more snowdrops."

However, that night large snowflakes swirled outside the window ... bigger than he had ever seen before. The sky darkened, the hills whitened—and the tired little boy fell asleep. Mama found him by the window—fast asleep. In his hand he was clasping a button and three coins. A wonderful button. The very one his mother needed.







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